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JCLR

Journal of Contemporary Language Research. 2023; 2(3): 139-148

DOI: 10.58803/jclr.v2i3.79

<http://jclr.rovedar.com/>

Research Article



A Contrastive Analysis of Disagreement Speech Act Used by Native Speakers of English and Iraqi EFL Learners in light of Politeness Strategies

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: 09/08/2023

Accepted: 10/09/2023



ABSTRACT

Introduction: Effective communication often involves expressing disagreement while maintaining social harmony, which is influenced by cultural and linguistic norms. Native speakers of English typically employ various politeness strategies in their disagreement speech acts. However, Iraqi English as a foreign language (EFL) learners may navigate these strategies differently due to variations in cultural norms and language proficiency. Therefore, the current study aimed to contrastively analyze the way Iraqi EFL learners and native English speakers perform the speech act of disagreement in light of politeness.

Methodology: In this regard, a discourse completion test (DCT) was administered to 66 participants, comprising 33 Iraqi EFL students and 33 native English speakers. The DCT was made up of scenarios that mirrored real-life circumstances to provoke responses from people who disagreed with them. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness was employed to analyze participants' utterances.

Results: The findings indicated that while expressing disagreement with people of higher, participants in both groups were more concerned with keeping their interlocutors' positive faces. Furthermore, the study findings indicated that despite differences in the two groups of participants, Iraqi EFL learners utilized positive indirect politeness strategies more frequently than English native speakers. On the other hand, native English speakers applied direct and negative politeness strategies.

Conclusion: Generally, the findings indicated that both groups tended to use the most direct type of disagreement as the social distance and power relation decreased.

1. Introduction

Understanding socio-cultural practices and linguistic norms is an essential aspect of becoming a great communicator in a second or foreign language (Taguchi, 2019). In other words, multilingualism entails more than just learning the syntax and lexicon of another language; it also necessitates the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge in terms of communicating (Taguchi, 2019). Pragmatic competence, a prerequisite for meaningful discourses, has changed over time and is now viewed as a never-ending multi-layered and multi-dimensional concept involving a wide variety of skills, including language and interpersonal knowledge, interpersonal communication abilities, and agency (Celce-Murcia, et al., 1995; Uso'-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2008). However, the abundance of pragmatics studies

has revealed that some aspects, such as speech acts, communicative interpretation, habits, humor, and prosody, are bedrocks in this line of work, of which speech acts are the most prevalent aspects of research (Cohen, 2017; Derakhshan, 2019a, 2019b; Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018; Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020).

Speakers, in the process of speech production, are extremely sensitive to contextual specifications since the meanings that words transfer and the communicative functions of spoken language depend on the social environments and the interlocutors (Vanessa, 2015). Accordingly, it is of utmost importance to cross-cultural pragmatic research to address the contrastive analysis of the same speech act in different cultures. Individuals from

► Cite this paper as: Al Jaid Z. A Contrastive Analysis of Disagreement Speech Act Used by Native Speakers of English and Iraqi EFL Learners in light of Politeness Strategies. Journal of Contemporary Language Research. 2023; 2(3): 139-148. DOI: 10.58803/jclr.v2i3.79

various cultural backgrounds have been confirmed to use various strategies to select and perform a specific speech act, depending on their cultural orientation, personality, and value systems (Yan, 2016). Disagreement as a particular speech act that "involves actively defending one's opinion, attacking another's position, or quietly withholding approval" (Edstrom, 2004, p. 1499) is not an exception.

Speech act of disagreement is considered a face-threatening act to the interlocutor as it contradicts his or her expectations. Expressing disagreement, which is unavoidable in everyday interaction, may threaten the relationship between the interlocutors, and this threat to the face of the interlocutor can be softened by the use of politeness strategies (Locher, 2004). Therefore, it requires a high level of pragmatic competence. With this in mind, The current study aimed to examine how politeness is manifested in the design of disagreement between native English speakers and Iraqi EFL learners. Iraq is collectively-oriented, while the U.S. is individually-oriented (Liang & Han, 2005). Therefore, the findings of the current study can help to identify the factors that influence the ways of disagreement expressions.

1.1. Review of the related literature

A large number of studies investigated cross-cultural and interlanguage behavior in different cultures (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Ellis, 1992; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Farenkia, 2014; Houk & Tatsuki, 2010; Jianda, 2006; Schauer, 2009; Takahashi & Beebe, 1993) have challenged the debate of universality versus cultural-specificity, discussing that strong-rooted cultural evaluations straightforwardly impact pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic behavior in the context of the second language.

At first, the idiosyncratic nature of the positive face, which expresses distinctiveness, agreement, and the desire to be accepted by others, against the negative face, that is freedom of individuals and avoiding intrusion on others, was proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). While Yu (2003), amongst other researchers in this field, proposed the final "goals of polite framework" (p. 1685) as not drastically distinctive from what Brown and Levinson proposed. Researchers argued that the notions of the face are drawn upon Western cultural norms, which primarily emphasize the self (Soliman, 2003; Wang, 2011). On the other hand, social balance and looking for the respect of the community are vital to Arabic culture, which is considered as positive politeness, rather than boarding individual inclinations and freedoms considered as negative politeness. Arab societies emanated to be inspired by being part of the whole and are communally-directed in strait contrast to the self-oriented community, compared to Western communities (Abed, 2011; Abdul Sattar & Che Lah, 2011; Alaoui, 2011; Al-Momani, 2009; Al-Eryani, 2007; Alkheder & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2018; Al-Marrani & Sazalie, 2010; Al-Tayib Umar, 2006; Al-Shboul et al. 2012; Bataineh, 2004; Nureddeen, 2008; Qanbar, 2012; Sharqawi & Anthony, 2019).

Studies also on other non-English speaking cultures have

struggled with the replicability of Brown and Levinson's theories, which were supported by empirical proof indicating an insignificant relationship in collectivist communities, such as Iran (Behnam & Niroomand, 2011; Ghafar Samar et al., 2013; Kuhi & Jadidi, 2012; Nodoushan, 2008); Poland and Hungary (Wierzbicka, 1991), and China (Hill et al., 1986; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988; 1989 Wang, 2011). Spencer-Oatey (2000) posited a substitutive view for nationalizing face. She called this rapport management and suggested face sensitivities, conversational goals, people's rights in society, and rights and obligations be the three basic components of her theory. Spencer-Oatey's focal point was less on the performance of politeness than how this operates in association with the interpersonal connection.

Lee-Wong (1994) and Yu (1999) were among the studies demonstrating 'directness' as a general strategy for interlocutors in a conversation, which is reported as a marker of both politeness and sincerity in a society. Yu (2011) argued that while the typical indirect construction may be considered a reasonable request by English speakers, this speculativeness inherently puts under question the honesty of the speakers in other cultures and may cause offense. As a result, speakers' thought processes have significantly influenced the semantics of their expressions, favoring brevity and straightforwardness as a means of conveying politeness. This inclination is a distinctive feature of communities that emphasize positive politeness. According to Kasper and Zhang (1995), students who studied abroad concluded that the interpretation of politeness in other countries might differ greatly from their expectations. Compared to Western nationalities, the students' expressions of age and body figures were considered too direct in Arabic countries. Such opinions were not considered impolite in Western culture, and directives are considered appropriate in their culture, but can be unfamiliar and uncomfortable for students from other countries (Kasper & Zhang, 1995).

As mentioned above, politeness is practically known to be marked by indirectness. Nevertheless, a common belief exists that indirectness does play a part in polite behavior in different cultures. Faerch and Kasper (1989) discovered that for British English, German, and Danish groups of speakers, internal modification is a must, but external modification is optional. Based on studies by Yu (2011) and Zhang (1995), the opposite is true in some other cultures, such as Eastern Asia. Contrasting East-West social structures may play an important role in how conversations are arranged. This is likely to be effective in shaping how conversations are conducted between speakers and listeners, determining the linguistic tools employed to ensure successful communication. Kim (2008) proposes that based upon the Confucian ideology of the significant notions of the family and community, age and situation ascertain the responsibilities that an individual takes in South Korean culture. This implies that younger or less competent members of a community are more easily forgiven for a fault or mistake, while older members, whose mistakes can tarnish both their reputation and that of the entire community, may face more severe consequences.

The final point, the importance of non-verbal apologetic behavior in Eastern cultures has been detected to be vastly misinterpreted by English speakers of Western cultures (Crystal, 2003; Guodong & Jing, 2005; Kim, 2008; Moore, 2001; Phuong, 2006; Watts, 2003). Hall (1989) argued that countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and China, are highly context-dependent cultures where the underlying perception of the context may have neutralized the requirement of a frank verbal apology, specific amongst in-group members of society. Considering minor offenses, this is generally substituted by bowing, smiling, and maybe silence. Silence is considered one of the most significant apologizing strategies in South Korean society (Kim, 2008). On the other hand, Western cultures are believed to be low-context-dependent. Transparency through explicit verbal exchanges is common and it is the speaker's commitment to grantees meaning that is conveyed through these means (Kim, 2008). However, it is probably to offend English speakers who may doubt the honesty of the apology and question the speaker's personality.

Considering all the cultural variations mentioned above, there are always places for a mismatch between the procedures taken by non-native speakers of English and those from Western societies. In each case, there are defined cultural expectations for what builds a successful interaction from both pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic views. There is a strong desire, therefore, for learners to understand how politeness is recognized in the target language culture.

There is evidence given by anthropologists and sociolinguists that individuals of culture create similar personality features (Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1991; Kluckhohn, 1962) and that members of one culture generally share common cultural features and characteristics. However, this does not imply that all members of a culture have the same precise behavioral ways because a broad range of individual differences exist. Nevertheless, people of a similar culture commonly share plenty of facets of behavior to different degrees (Tawalbeh & Al-Oqaily, 2012).

According to some scholars (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Leech, 1983), disagreement is a term of impoliteness and should be avoided since it can threaten the positive face by showing the speaker's lack of interest in the addressee's feelings and wants. So, this speech act has the power to threaten the face of both the speaker and hearer, as mentioned by Obeng (1999), for this reason, it is considered a dispreferred activity and needs to be avoided. Moreover, Sornig (1977) claims that disagreement is a face-threatening speech act which is reactive because it depends on the previous statement of the interlocutor. Rees-Miller (2000) mentions disagreement as a situation where a speaker believes that a suggestion, whether explicitly stated or implied, is incorrect, and this disagreement can manifest through spoken language that may not necessarily focus solely on that suggestion. Honda (2002) defines disagreement as an activity in which two conversants try to mention their personal position by opposing each other. From the pragmatic point of view, the speech act of disagreement can be divided

into certain types, namely direct and indirect disagreement. The speech act of disagreement is considered face-threatening since it may endanger the face of the addressee; to compensate for that, the speaker must be aware of politeness strategies in each specific context.

While disagreeing, Americans prefer to "objectify, depersonalize and analyze the problems" (Varner & Beamer, 2005, p. 259). Additionally, Stewart and Bennett (1991) believe that in the American-style confrontation, the rules of interpersonal conflict require opponents to do two things simultaneously: they compete and cooperate with each other. Therefore, the language used by Americans conveyed the "feeling of confrontation and depersonalization of opponents" (p. 99). The American standard of showdown and American explicitness in communication frequently offends foreigners, both abroad and at home.

In their study on analyzing the speech act of disagreement among Iraqi EFL learners, Sharqawi and Anthony (2019) indicated that both males and females used equivalent levels of explicit disagreement techniques, while females used much more indirect disagreement strategies than their male counterparts. Bavarsad et al. (2015) explored the influence of two social factors, namely gender and power, on various types of disagreement expressed by young Iranian EFL university students. The researchers found four other patterns that were used frequently by both males and females. The patterns were introduced as thanking, mitigation of apology, providing reason, and mitigation of god willing. The researchers stated that all these four patterns were considered to save the interlocutors' face as there was no direct contradiction.

Although empirical studies have provided insights into these concepts in numerous cultures, up to the present day, a limited number of contrastive studies in Iraqi and American contexts have considered these areas. With this background in mind, the present study aimed to contrastively focus on the use of disagreement speech act by Iraqi EFL learners and academic American native speakers of English by considering the socio-cultural issues.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The current research was a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic study of social disagreement strategies by Iraqi EFL learners and Americans. To this end, 40 native speakers of American English (18 females and 22 males) and Iraqi students who were Arabic native speakers (17 females and 18 males) college students took part in the study. These Iraqi learners were selected among those who were born in Iraq and have never stayed in English-speaking countries. After removing incomplete data, the results of discourse completion tests from 33 American students and 33 Iraqi Arabic native-speaker students were analyzed. The age range of the American and Iraqi students was between 17 and 35 years, with an average of 25 years. For the Iraqi students, their English proficiency was intermediate level.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Proficiency test

The quick placement test was used as a convenient test of English language proficiency developed by Oxford University Press and Cambridge TESOL to provide a reliable and time-saving method to find learners' real English levels. It was quick and easy to administer and ideal for placement testing and examination screening. It took approximately 20 minutes to administer. All the questions in the test were in multiple-choice format. Based on the scoring criteria, Iraqi participants whose achieved scores were 30 to 39 were categorized as intermediate students. This standard placement test would be highly valid according to the consensus of a team of experts.

2.2.2. Discourse completion task

Bavarsad et al. (2015) designed the discourse completion test (DCT) as the main instrument for collecting data for this study. It is a type of questionnaire that describes some natural situations to which the interlocutors are expected to react, that is, declaring their disagreement by selecting the right choice. According to Gass and Houck (1999), the main advantages of using a DCT are consistency and efficiency. The DCT allowed data to be collected over a short period and from a large number of participants. It also made it possible to analyze responses coherently because the roles of subjects and contextual factors had been controlled (Gass & Houck, 1999). The DCT used in the current study consisted of nine scenarios in which the participants should disagree with people of higher statuses, peers, and people of lower statuses ([Appendix A](#)).

2.2.3. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Theory

According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, a combination of social distance, power relationship, and degree of imposition determine politeness regardless of the culture. It divides the politeness strategies into five categories of

1. Explicit/direct strategy, e.g., "She is no good";
2. Negative politeness strategy, e.g., "Sorry, but I don't like her";
3. Positive politeness strategy, e.g., "I accept that you like her a lot. But I don't like her very much";
4. Implied strategy, e.g., "Everyone has their own opinion";
5. Avoidance strategy, e.g., say nothing.

This model was used to analyze the disagreement strategies produced by the participants in both groups regarding politeness.

2.3. Procedure

This contrastive study followed a qualitative research design. Due to the importance of accessibility criteria for subject selection, convenience random sampling was used. For the reasons of convenience and reliability of the responses, the subjects were explained to the students through online classes.

The data were collected using DCT, in which a situation

was first briefly presented. Then, the participants were asked to write their answers in an empty field provided in the questionnaire. Moreover, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic for the Iraqi students.

The survey was taken utilizing Google form, an online survey tool. The participants were ensured that all of the obtained information would be kept confidential and only used for the present research. Each participant answered a background questionnaire at the beginning of the survey. The students were then asked to read nine scenarios displayed on a Google form and type their responses to each scenario in English for the American students and in Arabic for the Iraqi students in the text boxes provided. This process of data collection lasted for one month.

The DCT collected the topics were analyzed using Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory. Invalid responses were discarded, and the total number of valid responses was determined. The frequency of each politeness strategy was calculated. Then, the two types of DCT (Arabic and English versions) were compared.

3. Results

To investigate how politeness is exercised among Iraqi and American participants while they disagree, the nine designed situations were analyzed with respect to the power status, including strategies used for higher status, strategies used for equal status, and strategies used for lower status. These three presented patterns were chosen as samples to illustrate the most common existing disagreement strategies concerning politeness.

3.1. Strategies used for higher status

To investigate the way politeness was practiced by the participants, their response to each situation was categorized based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory. To delve into the responses, the situations in the DCT were classified as higher status, equal status, and lower status with regard to the formality and power relations between the interlocutors. The higher-status situations included

Situation 1

You visit your doctor due to your constant headaches. He believes that you must change your method of treatment, but you are completely satisfied with it and you disagree with the doctor. You say:

Situation 2

You are driving on a highway when a policeman stops and fines you for not paying attention to the signs. He suggests that you take a driving course to refresh yourself on the signage. You feel no need to do this. You say:

Situation 3

You see your child's school principal. He tells you it is

Table 1.
Politeness Strategies Used for Higher Status

Politeness Strategies	Americans	Percentage	Iraqi	Percentage
Direct strategy	21	22%	11	12%
Negative politeness strategy	23	24%	16	17%
Positive politeness strategy	19	20%	22	23%
Implied strategy	7	7%	17	17%
Avoidance strategy	26	27%	30	31%

better to change your child's major because her future will not be so good. You disagree with him and think your child is successful in this field. You say:

The comparison of the two groups revealed much difference in the application of politeness strategies. The results of the study showed that Iraqi participants were more sensitive about the power and status of their interlocutor and applied politeness strategies.

Regarding social status, it was found that Iraqi participants produced responses of disagreement through not only disagreement strategies but also some other contradictions related to non-personal involvement issues. As can be seen in Table 1, Iraqi participants employed strategies that were indirect, meaning that they preferred to use avoidance and implied strategies (48%) more than Americans (34%).

Participants in both groups used positive politeness at the same rate. They preferred to start their disagreement by thanking. For example, in situation one "You visit your doctor due to your constant headaches. He believes that you must change your method of treatment, but you are completely satisfied with it and you disagree with the doctor."

One of the Iraqi participants mentioned that "شكرا لك ايها الطبيب ولكنني اشعر بتحسن مع هذا الدواء لذا ارحب بالموافقة عليه"

The same was observed for American participants. For instance, in situation 2 "You are driving on a highway when a police officer stops you and fines you for not paying attention to signs. It is suggested that you take a driving course to update yourself on the signs. Don't feel the need to do so", an American participant stated that

"Ok. Thank you officer for the suggestion. I will consider taking the course and will pay more attention to street signs."

Another feature commonly observed in responses by Iraqi students referred to Mitigation of God willing (which was completely related to the participants' culture and religion). As an example, for situation 3 "You see your child's school principal. He tells you it's better to change your child's major because her future will not be so good. you disagree with him and think your child is successful in this field", an Iraqi participant declared "لا اضن ذلك طفلي جيد في مجاله الحالى ويسنبح فيه بذن الله تعالى"

However, such a thing was not observed in American responses. Moreover, in higher-status situations, linguistic markers were used in a way to soften or strengthen the disagreement. This was more apparent in responses provided by Iraqi learners; however, discourse marker like "I think" before producing a certain claim was seen in some responses.

Regarding negative politeness, Americans used this politeness strategy more than their Iraqi counterparts (24% vs. 17%). This means they are not as conservative as Iraqi participants when talking to a person with a higher power status, and a power asymmetry exists.

3.2. Strategies used for equal status

The three DCT situations for equal status entail the following statements.

Situation 4

By coincidence, you see one of your old colleagues, Mr. Ahmadi, in the street. He suggests that you change your hairstyle because it makes you look older and less beautiful. Unlike him, you like this style a lot. You say:

Situation 5

You are speaking with a neighbor who says they aren't pleased with the building's maintenance man. They suggest that you both approach the landlord about hiring a new one. You disagree with your neighbor's suggestion because you have been completely satisfied with the maintenance man. You say:

Situation 6

You buy a piece of clothing and come back home. When you put it on, your spouse says that the color doesn't suit you and it's better to change the color. You say:

As power asymmetry decreases, more direct strategies can be seen in participants of both groups. Respondents in both groups used more direct strategies of disagreement when there was less social distance between the speaker and addressee. Regarding situation 6 "You buy a piece of clothing and come back home. When you put it on, your spouse says that the color doesn't suit you and it's better to change the color", an American respondent said, "No, I love to wear this color, You'd better choose for yourself".

In the same situation, an Iraqi EFL learner mentioned "على العكس اضن ان هذا اللون يناسبني لذلك سارتديه"

Although the power status of this situation and situation 5 are somehow similar, the degree of solidarity was higher in situation 6. Therefore, respondents were more cautious while expressing their opposition in situation 5 "You are speaking with a neighbor who says they are not pleased with the building's maintenance man. They suggest that you both approach the landlord about hiring a new one. You disagree with your neighbor's suggestion because you have been

Table 2.
Politeness Strategies Used for Equal Status

Politeness Strategies	Americans	Percentage	Iraqi	Percentage
Direct strategy	27	28%	18	19%
Negative politeness strategy	13	14%	11	12%
Positive politeness strategy	28	29%	21	22%
Implied strategy	2	2%	5	6%
Avoidance strategy	26	27%	40	41%

completely satisfied with the maintenance man" by providing clauses, such as "I'm sorry to say this but....". If the person that the respondents were talking to was a classmate or a stranger, they would talk normally, but if they did not know the person at all, the conversation would be more formal.

Another point of consideration refers to the implementation of negative politeness strategies. In both groups, the use of negative politeness strategies decreased when they were communicating with someone with equal status, compared to a higher status (Table 2). The reason can be related to caring about the addressees' feelings more when talking to their friends or neighbors.

3.3. Strategies used for lower status

Lower status situations included

Situation 7

Your babysitter suggests that one of your kids be monitored by a psychiatrist. You completely disagree and think it would be unnecessary to do this. You say

Situation 8

You are sitting in a restaurant and ordering your favorite food. The waiter suggests ordering a new dish instead, but you don't like his suggestion. You say

Situation 9

You want to buy a house. The sweeper of that street tells you that there are a lot of problems in this quarter and it is

better to buy a house two streets ahead. You have searched before and you are sure about your choice. You say

As can be seen in Table 3, direct strategies of disagreement politeness increase, and the social distance decreases. When speakers in both groups have greater power than the addressee; and when the severity of disagreement is less, direct politeness strategies and negative politeness strategies are used more.

Moreover, personal involvement was observed in the last three situations for both groups. An example of personal involvement for situation 9 "You want to buy a house. The sweeper of that street tells you that there are a lot of problems in this quarter and it's better to buy a house two streets ahead. You have searched before and you are sure about your choice. The following statement was stated by an Iraqi EFL learner stated

"أكنتني بحثت مسبقاً عن المكان وقد أحببته لذلك سأشترى فيه"

Therefore, when confronting the lower status, it could be easily noticed that in disagreeing with people of lower social status, the participants showed a greater tendency towards direct strategies of disagreeing.

Regardless of social status, respondents in both groups would take care of their speech in interaction with people older than them in order to show that they respect older people. For situation 7 "your babysitter suggests that one of your kids be monitored by a psychiatrist. You completely disagree and think it would be unnecessary to do this". One of the Iraqi respondents declared. "اقرر لك رعاية ابني لكن اضنهها" بحاله جيده ولاحتاج لاي عناية خاصة"

As the social distance decreased, individuals in both groups used fewer implied strategies and preferred to talk about things directly. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of politeness strategies by the participants in both groups was affected by the power relations.

Table 3.
Politeness Strategies Used for Lower Status

Politeness Strategies	Americans	Percentage	Iraqi	Percentage
Direct strategy	28	29%	29	30%
Negative politeness strategy	25	26%	23	24%
Positive politeness strategy	30	31%	20	21%
Implied strategy	1	1%	2	2%
Avoidance strategy	12	13%	21	23%

4. Discussion

As in recent years, there has been an argument as to whether the presumptions of politeness theory, which were based on the Western world, furthermore hold reliable for the Eastern world, i.e., whether East and West are essentially similar or radically different (Gu, 1990; Haugh, 2005; Ide, 1989; Leech, 2007; Leech & Tatiana, 2014; Mao,

1994; Matsumoto, 1988). The body of literature promotes one end of the spectrum over the other; however, a few studies have indicated East-West integration (e.g., Zhang & Wu, 2018). In this part, the researcher presented some of the studies carried out in different parts of the world, ranging from Western to Eastern culture, taking the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson into account.

In the present study, the researcher made a comparison

between Western and Eastern cultures by taking Brown and Levinson's (1987) view into consideration. In this regard, three social strata from two cultures were compared. The analysis revealed that in the majority of cases in higher status groups, the eastern Iraqi participants applied indirect, positive politeness strategies. The findings were similar to other studies revealing that non-natives' expressions of disagreement are not heavily loaded with direct disagreement strategies (Asghar et al., 2021; Behnam & Niroomand, 2011; Kreutel, 2007). On the other hand, American westernized participants were more concerned about using direct, negative politeness strategies. In the same line, Khoirunnisa and Hardjanto (2018) indicated that negative politeness (41.6% of the time) was the most commonly used method by English native speakers because it is the most effective strategy for reducing the imposing of disagreement statements.

In both groups, the participants made use of direct and negative politeness strategies while they interacted with equal-level interlocutors. As both groups communicated with people of the lower class of society, their preference was towards using more direct strategies of disagreement. So, it is evident that there was a positive relationship between the politeness strategies they used and the existing power relations. Likewise, Chen et al. (2006) found as far as social distance and level of formality are concerned, these variables influence interlocutors (native and non-native) in their preference for strategies of disagreement and politeness. This means that both groups employ more direct disagreement with those who are close to them. As the social distance increases, interlocutors prefer to use more and more politeness strategies.

Considering culture classification by Hofstede (2001), Iraqis are more concerned with power distance and can be featured as collectivist, compared to Americans with their individualistic nature. However, as the results indicated, it can be argued that in recent years, Iraqis have tried to adopt Western culture and are more inclined to use the same strategies as their American counterparts while disagreeing with people of different social strata.

5. Conclusion

The present study aimed to contrastively analyze the way through which politeness strategies are practiced when native English speakers and Iraqi EFL learners disagree. The findings indicated that the choice of politeness strategies differed in both groups of participants while performing speech act of disagreement in relation to people with different power statuses. Although factors of social distance, power relationship, and degree of imposition affect communicative action universally, The frequencies of these factors vary from context to context. Future research could investigate how contextual factors beyond power and social distance, such as cultural norms, gender, and age, influence the choice of politeness strategies in disagreement interactions. Given the growing reliance on technology for communication, future research could also investigate how politeness strategies are employed in digital communication

platforms, such as social media, email, and messaging apps. This could uncover unique challenges and opportunities in maintaining politeness in virtual interactions.

Declarations

Competing interest

The author declares no competing interest.

Funding

None

Authors' contribution

Mohammad Ghazanfari conceptualized and supervised the study. Zeinab Al Jaid collected and analyzed the study data. The authors read and confirmed the final draft of the article.

Availability of data and materials

The data is available upon request.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank all participants who took part in the study.

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Appendix A

The nine situations involved in the DCT were as follows:

Situation 1: You visit your doctor due to your constant headaches. He believes that you must change your method of treatment but you are completely satisfied with it and you disagree with the doctor. You say:

Situation 2: You are driving on a highway when a policeman stops and fines you for not paying attention to the signs. He suggests that you take a driving course to refresh yourself on the signage. You feel no need to do this. You say:

Situation 3: You see your child's school principal. He tells you it's better to change your child's major because her future will not be so good. You disagree with him and think your child is successful in this field. You say:"

Situation 4: "By coincidence, you see one of your old colleagues, Mr. Ahmadi, in the street. He suggests that you change your hairstyle because it makes you look older and less beautiful. Unlike him, you like this style a lot." You say:

Situation 5: You are speaking with a neighbor who says they aren't pleased with the building's maintenance man. They suggest that you both approach the landlord about hiring a new one. You disagree with your neighbor's suggestion because you have been completely satisfied with the maintenance man. You say:

Situation 6: "You buy a piece of clothing and come back home. When you put it on, your spouse says that the color doesn't suit you and that it's better to change the color. You say:"

Situation 7: Your babysitter suggests that one of your kids be monitored by a psychiatrist. You completely disagree and think it would be unnecessary to do this.". You say:

Situation 8: "You are sitting in a restaurant and ordering your favorite food. The waiter suggests ordering a new dish instead, but you don't like his suggestion." You say."

Situation 9: You want to buy a house. The sweeper of that street tells you that there are a lot of problems in this quarter and it's better to buy a house two streets ahead. You have searched before and you are sure about your choice. You say:"